

# Run-Birding: Want to run a four-minute mile and spot all your favorite birds?

By Austin White



You might see this Eastern bluebird while run-birding the streets of Williamsport this spring.

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Recently, my wife and I have been combining two of our favorite outdoor activities – birding and running. We run at our favorite birding hotspots, eyes-wide and ears perked, and stop only when we see or hear something interesting. We coined it “bird running” and it has been a welcome escape from our work-from-home routine during the shut-down.

After a few weeks of bird running, I did some research on the subject. Turns out we are late to the party. According to Google, it is called “Run-Birding” and it is a recognized trend. I like our name better, but I will defer to the Internet.

How can you become a Run-Birder? If you are a runner, take out those earbuds and start listening to nature’s sound-track and observed the world as it swooshes past you. If you are a birder, ditch the jeans for some athletic gear and pick up the pace. Run-Birding can be skewed to

either side of the bird-run spectrum. Burn a few extra calories, or take in a little extra of what mother nature has to show off. It's your choice.

As a veteran bird runner, er, Run-Birder, I can say with certainty there are three rules to the sport, as discussed below. A caveat, however — these rules have not been formally adopted by the National Run-Birding Institute, so use sparingly (Note: if you are on the Board of or employed by the National Run-Birding Institute, I apologize for making your organization into a punchline – I did not know you existed. I'm sorry. Also, consider changing your name. Email me for a suggestion)

**Rule Number 1: Calling a stop.** If you are running in a group, and someone calls STOP, everyone must stop. It is up to the caller to justify the stop to the group by spotting an interesting bird. Maybe a Belted Kingfisher swooping down from tree, or a Ruby-Throated Hummingbird buzzing by. If the call turns out to be a usual like an American Robin or, worse, an overweight bumble bee, the caller loses six points.



You might see this brown thrasher while run-burning the streets of Williamsport this spring.

**Rule Number 2: Bring the right gear.** While optics are welcome in the world of Run-Birding, they carry a serious penalty: weight. Run-Birding with a full-frame digital SLR and a 600mm lens is not recommended. It will weigh you down and you will probably break something or someone. A small monocular is a better choice. There are many small and light

monoculars on the market. Opt for one with a hand-strap and you will barely notice it is there.

Rule Number 3: Recognize limitations of the sport. Compared to traditional birding, Run-Birding is loud and draws attention. Keep Run-Birding on the streets and other places where noise and motion can be expected. These issues can also affect the Run-Birding group, providing an advantage to the Run-Birders in the lead. The most successful Run-Birders stick close together so everyone has an equal shot at calling a stop.

My wife and I follow these rules and employ a strategy similar to our traditional birding: she is the eyes and I am the ears. My heart beating at 160 bpm has no effect on my keen sense of hearing. But my vision is poor, and even worse when trees are flashing by. My wife is the opposite – she could spot a Ruby-crowned Kinglet from 50 yards out, and at an eight-minute mile pace (she’s probably hearing the same things I hear, but she doesn’t say anything so I feel useful. Thanks, Liz)

OK. Back to that four-minute mile thing.

Here’s the rub. I am campaigning for a Rule Number 4 to be introduced into Run-Birding (crazy, I know!). In this proposed rule, a Run-Birder will earn a 15-second deduction from their run time for each unique bird species spotted during the run. This could be the great equalizer of Run-Birding. An expert birder who runs a leisurely twelve-minute mile pace could run a four-minute mile if he/she spots 32 birds during a one-mile run!

Yes, that would be extremely difficult for even an expert birder. But running a four-minute mile is a task accomplished by only the most elite runners in the world. The key is in striking a balance.

But remember — the faster you run, the harder it is to spot birds. That is the Run-Birders’ dilemma.

PHOTOS J. Michael Wiley of Williamsport